

BULLETIN of the
MUSEUM OF ART
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN



VOL. XXVIII

NO. 2

NOVEMBER 1940

Cover—Formal Rooster Weather-Vane.
Cast iron with cut iron tail, American,
mid 19th century. Jesse Metcalf Fund.

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The Architecture of Thomas Tefft

by Barbara Wriston

THOMAS ALEXANDER TEFFT was born in 1826, during a chaotic period. In order to understand his work, we must know something of the background of the years during which he lived. The first fifty years of the nineteenth century were years of revolution: not one revolution but many. First, in point of time, was the industrial revolution which began during the closing years of the eighteenth century and is still going on. The nineteenth century was also a period of intense political activity. In France, revolution was followed by reaction and reaction by revolution for the first half of the century. England found itself facing a constantly shifting scene abroad and at home a never ending struggle over social legislation. All Europe, in fact, was torn by wars, political upheavals, and social changes. Transportation and communication increased in speed and efficiency — railroads, steamships, and the telegraph brought the affairs and ideas of the world to everyone's doorstep. Photography, toward the end of the period, began to take the place of engraving, so that travellers abroad on the Grand Tour would bring home photographs of imposing buildings they had seen to hang on their walls. Thus a knowledge of architectural styles became more widespread than ever before.

Intellectuals were torn between classicism, romanticism, and realism. Small wonder then, that the nineteenth century saw an incredible number of architectural "styles" instead of the more or less steady development of the eighteenth century. Stuart and Revett became almost household names and Piranesi's engravings of real and imaginary classical ruins were well known. As men began with the study of antiquity, it was only natural that, continuing their studies, they should proceed to the other historical styles. Scholars published books which were to be found in many libraries, some of which we know were in Tefft's collection.

He was born in Richmond, Rhode Island. At the early age of seventeen he was teaching in a local school, when he attracted the attention of Henry Barnard, Commissioner of Public Schools for Rhode Island. Barnard brought him to Providence, got him a job with the firm of Tallman and Bucklin, and encouraged him to enter Brown. At college he seems to have been a determined rather than a facile student.

Before his graduation in 1851, Tefft had already made a name for himself as an architect. In 1848, he had designed a school building on Benefit Street to house John Kingsbury's School for Young Ladies. During the same year he made the drawings for the Union Depot in Providence, now demolished. The latter (illustrated in *Rhode Island Architecture*, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Junior, Rhode Island Museum Press, 1939) was built in what became Tefft's favorite style and material: Lombard Romanesque design executed in brick.

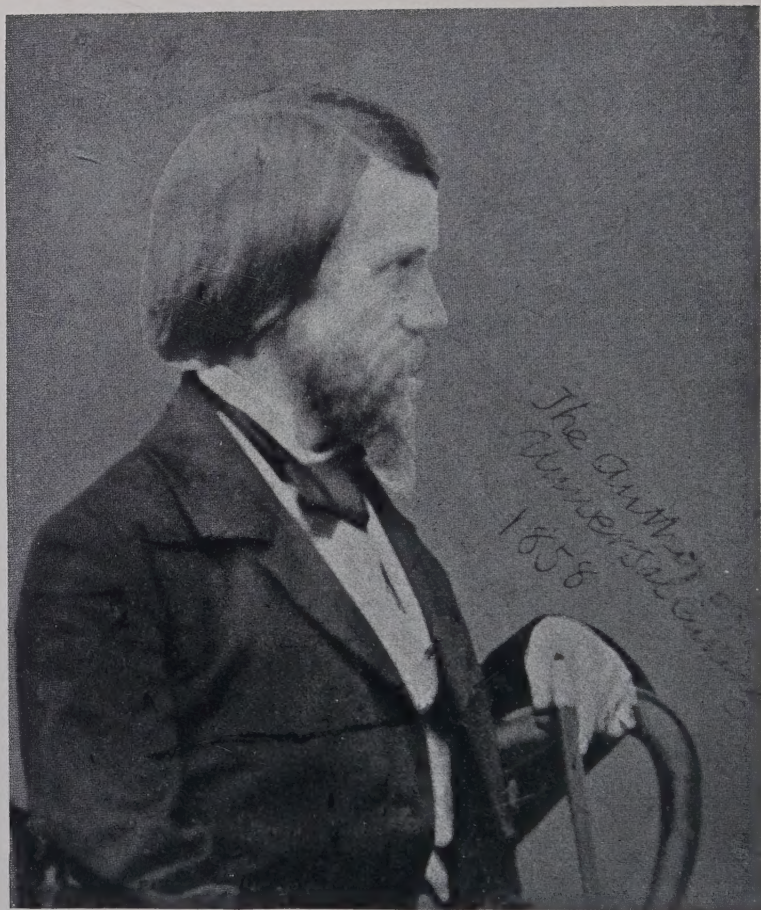


Fig. 25 Thomas Tefft in 1858. Courtesy of The Providence Athenaeum.

Although many of his earlier drawings show Gothic influence, he seems to have become convinced that Gothic was unsuitable for schools and dwelling-houses. The Romanesque appealed to him as being graceful and with a type of fenestration well adapted to allow the proper amount of light. Henry Barnard agreed with him, for he published several of Tefft's designs in his book, *School Architecture or contributions to the improvement of school-houses in the United States*, published in New York in 1848. Thus Tefft was years ahead of Richardson in the United States and almost contemporary with Friedrich von Gaertner, the great neo-Romanesque architect in Germany.

As the illustrations accompanying this article show, Tefft did not limit himself to any one style. The drawings for the prison, unhappily never built, show a modified classic revival influence; not however, the temple style so popular during his youth.

This plan was one of the earliest to show the use of two story cell blocks with corridors running around the outside. Renaissance design influenced him in the Tully Bowen house, as is shown by one of the working drawings. The larger Hoppin house is of the same general type. Both of these buildings are still standing in Providence. The projected design for a City Hall has the same influence. It was probably designed by Tefft. His deep interest in Lombard is illustrated by the two drawings for the South Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut.

Like many other young men of his time, Tefft had a great desire to go to Europe and see the monuments which had inspired his work. In 1856, he had the opportunity and sailed in December. He did little if any designing on the trip although he made many notes for future use, and took some of his own drawings to show abroad. In England he became acquainted with John Ruskin, the chief literary exponent of Gothic; a style which Tefft had left behind him.

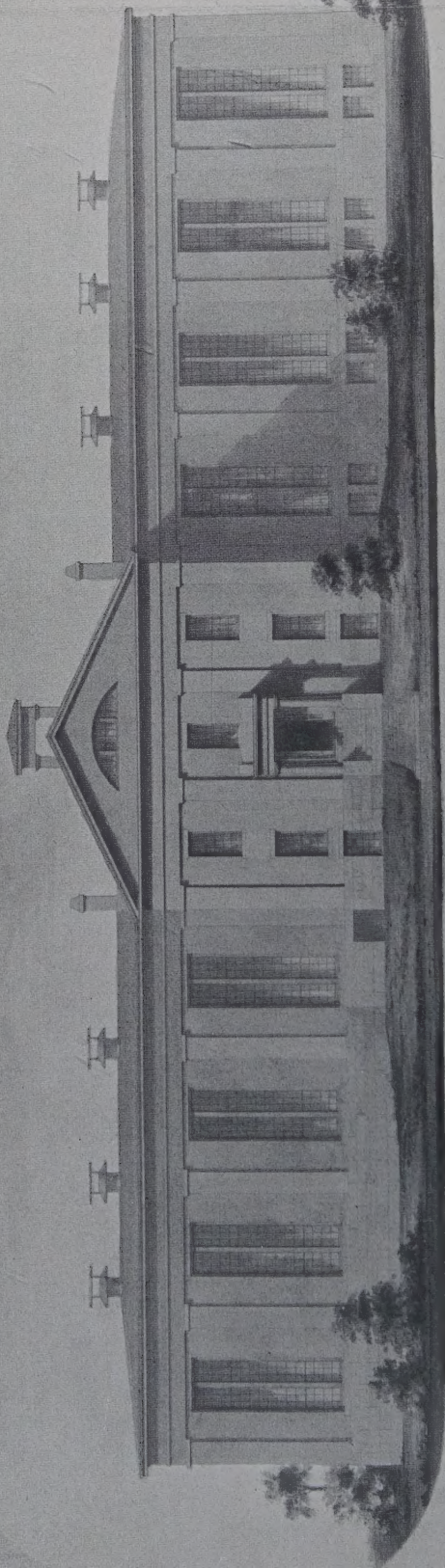
Part of the expenses for the trip were paid by two series of articles describing places which he visited and including some comments on the monuments he saw. One set was published in *The New York Times* and the other in *The Crayon*. In the articles for the latter, Tefft became very outspoken, criticizing some of the prevailing architectural tricks used both here and in England.

"We believe, that the sacrifice of time and money in the erection of sham clear-stories, groined ceilings, 'lathe and plaster', monstrous wood cornices with consols and brackets, etc., put on, and then made to counterfeit sandstone or marble — the building of tall spires of white pine, made to imitate Connecticut

Were there no other (sources) of history
we might read in the remains of ancient
buildings the general character and
intelligence of the people that erected
them

Architecture or the Monumental art
is the true exponent of the intelligence.
the wealth and the power of any people

Fig. 26 Reproduced from the writings of Thomas Tefft. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society.



FRONT ELEVATION

STATE PRISON
AND
COUNTY JAIL
PROVIDENCE
R.I.

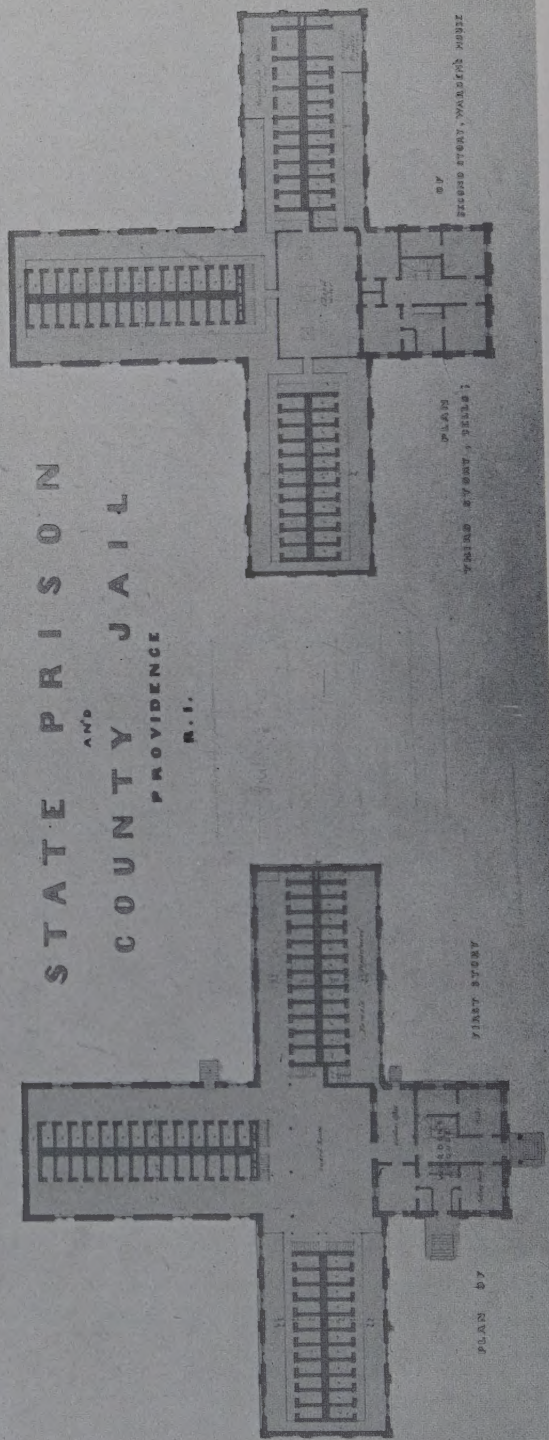


Fig. 27 Design for a projected State Prison and County Jail in Providence, Rhode Island.
Designed by Thomas Tefft, 1855.



Fig. 28 Thomas F. Hoppin House. Corner Benefit and John Streets, Providence, Rhode Island.
Designed by Thomas Telford, 1852.

freestone, and the grossly absurd decoration usually palmed off as 'fresco', and all similar architectural tricks and cheats, to be wrong, undeniably wrong, criminal, wicked."

He also criticized "temple" architecture and complained that the only way to tell whether the "temple" was a house or a church was by going inside. Later in the same article he says, "When will architects begin to think more and copy less?", a sentiment expressed frequently today. And again, "James Stuart and Nicholas Revett would never have gone to Athens in 1751 to obtain for publication the accurate measurements and details of the Temples of the Grecian capital, could they have foreseen the disastrous influence of their labors upon architectural art." Nevertheless, he had some kind words for American eighteenth century houses, for in an address to the Newport Historical Society in 1853, he said, "In all the plans of these buildings that we have observed in no case is the convenience of the internal arrangement sacrificed to external appearance."

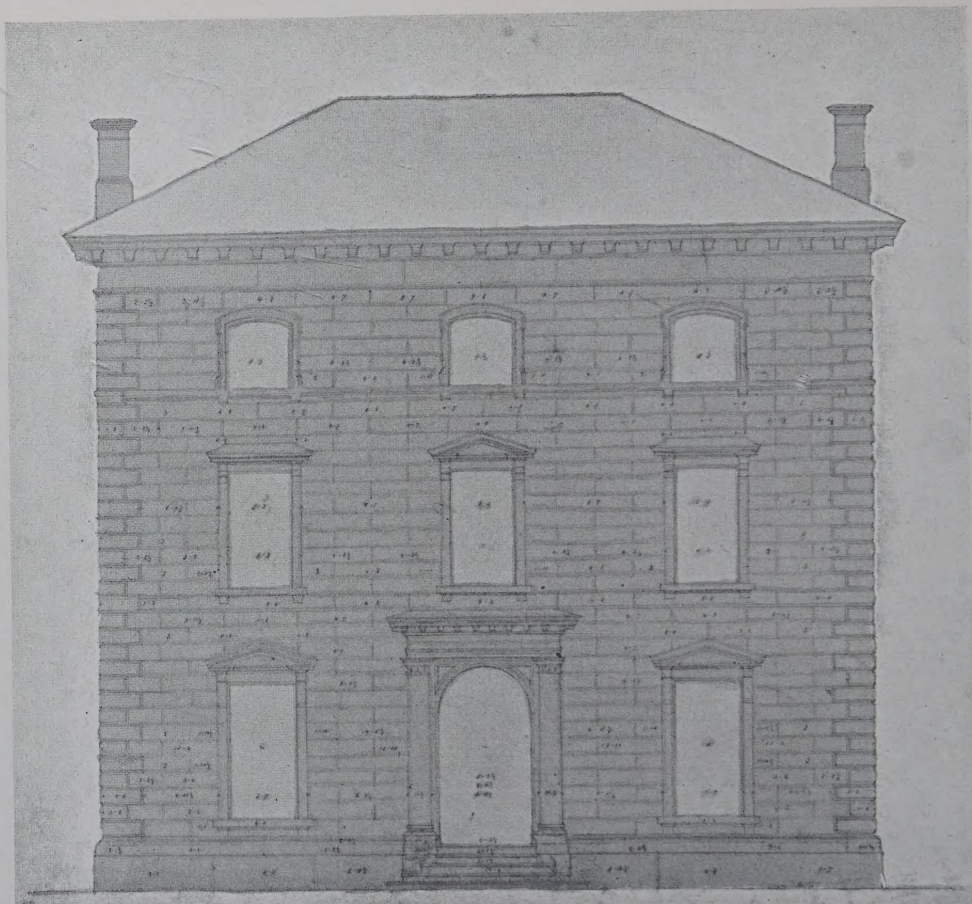


Fig. 29 Working drawing for the facade of the Tully Bowen House.
Designed by Thomas Tefft in Providence, 1852-53.

Not only did he comment upon the past, but he also laid down a few rules for architects of his own day.

"In the arrangement of a plan, the living room should command the approach to the house, the morning or afternoon sunlight and the principal view and by no means should the parlor or the room least used occupy the pleasantest portion of the house; that is a common error and should be avoided . . .

"A plenty of light is another essential feature of comfort, but it is an absurdity to build so many windows in a house that a portion of them are to be forever kept shut — thus increasing expense in building and coldness in winter."

Tefft's work was not confined to Rhode Island and Connecticut. He submitted plans for the main building for a female college in Poughkeepsie, New York; these however, were rejected in favor of the plans for the present Main Hall at Vassar College. Drawings for a college in Richmond, Virginia, met with better success and the buildings were

put up at a cost of about \$60,000. There are also Tefft buildings in Worcester and Williamstown, Massachusetts, and some factory buildings were designed by him for a town in Indiana.

In addition to architectural design, Thomas Tefft had many other important interests. He was one of a company of Rhode Island men to found the Rhode Island Art Association, and exhibited two of his drawings at its first exhibition in September, 1854. One was the drawing of the South Baptist Church, illustrated here; the other was a "Perspective View of Central Church" rendered for him by Charles P. Hartshorn. Hartshorn was a local artist whose main interest was in drawing botanical plates. Doubtless inspired by Barnard, Tefft also studied art education and when he went abroad, Barnard made him Commissioner of Industrial Art Education from Rhode Island. It was intended that he should study the problem in Europe and report to Barnard, but his death prevented it.

Outside of art and architecture, he had one other vital interest. It was his dream to see a universal currency system put into effect and most of his time after 1856 was spent in pursuing that end. The pamphlets which he published on the subject and the elaborate notebooks he made on money are still in existence. However, he was not to finish that program either, for in 1859, he caught a fever and died in Florence. Several years

Fig. 30 Wash drawing for the facade of the South Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut. Designed by Thomas Tefft.



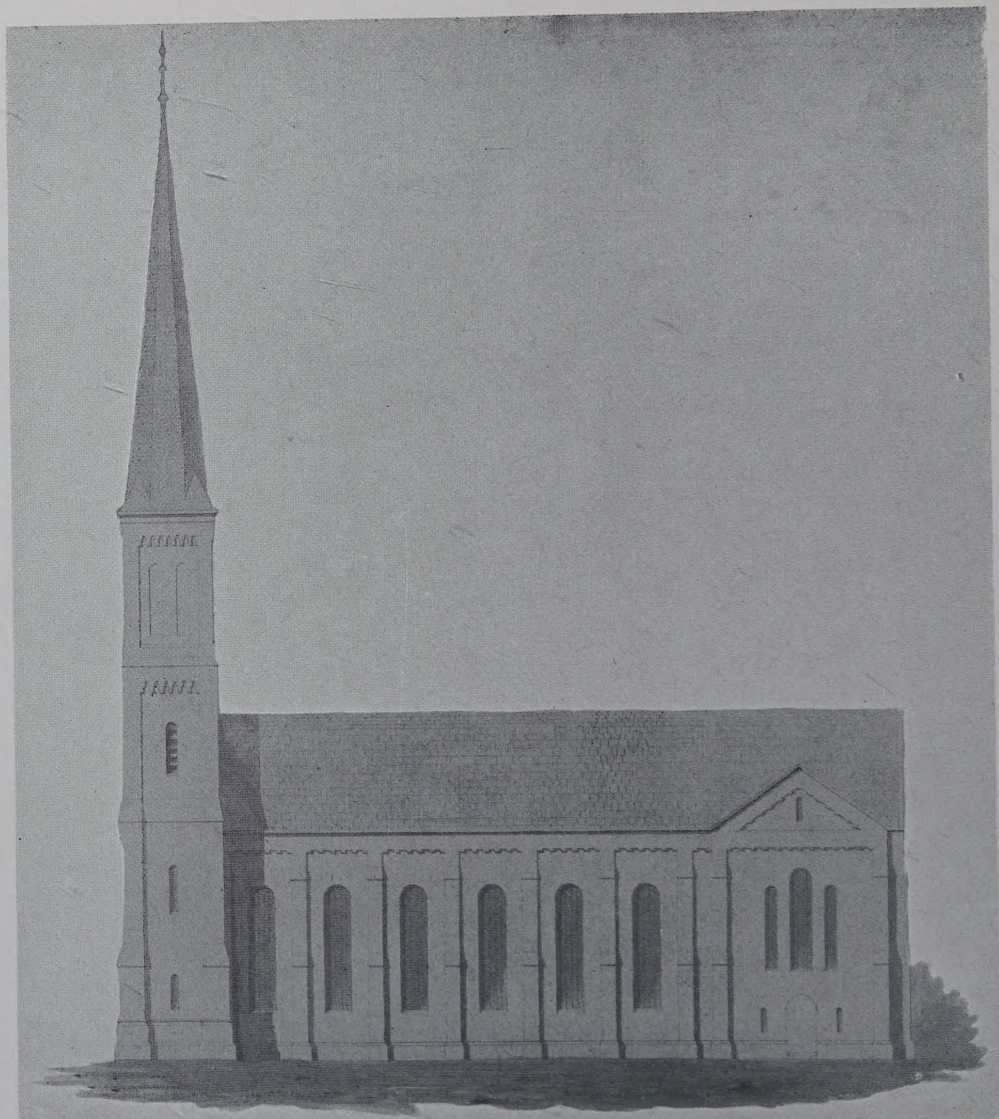


Fig. 31 Wash drawing of the side elevation for the South Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut. Designed by Thomas Tefft.

later his body was brought back to Providence and buried here.

Thomas Tefft was the most able architect in Rhode Island during the forties and fifties, and as a product of his time was caught up by the stream of eclecticism in those decades. Doubtless the briefness of his career and the appearance of several long lived architects in New York soon after his death, helped to obscure his name. Providence is



Fig. 32 Design for a projected City Hall in Providence, Rhode Island.
Attributed to Thomas Tefft.

fortunate in having so many examples of his work. Other places in the state still have some of his model school houses, although it is to be doubted whether they elevate the taste of the students who spend their days inside, as they were intended to do. It is perhaps as well that he didn't live to see the palmy days of the "Reign of Terror" in architecture with the excessive use of "adornments" and gingerbread which he hated. Without ever using the word functional, Tefft did his best to create useful and beautiful buildings — to use his own words, "A building should show first what it is. It should possess an unmistakable expression of purpose. Let the material be simple and undisguised."



Fig. 33 Tankard by Paul Revere, Boston, Mass., 1735-1818. Gift of Joseph G., Rebekah G., and Mary G. Henshaw, 1938.

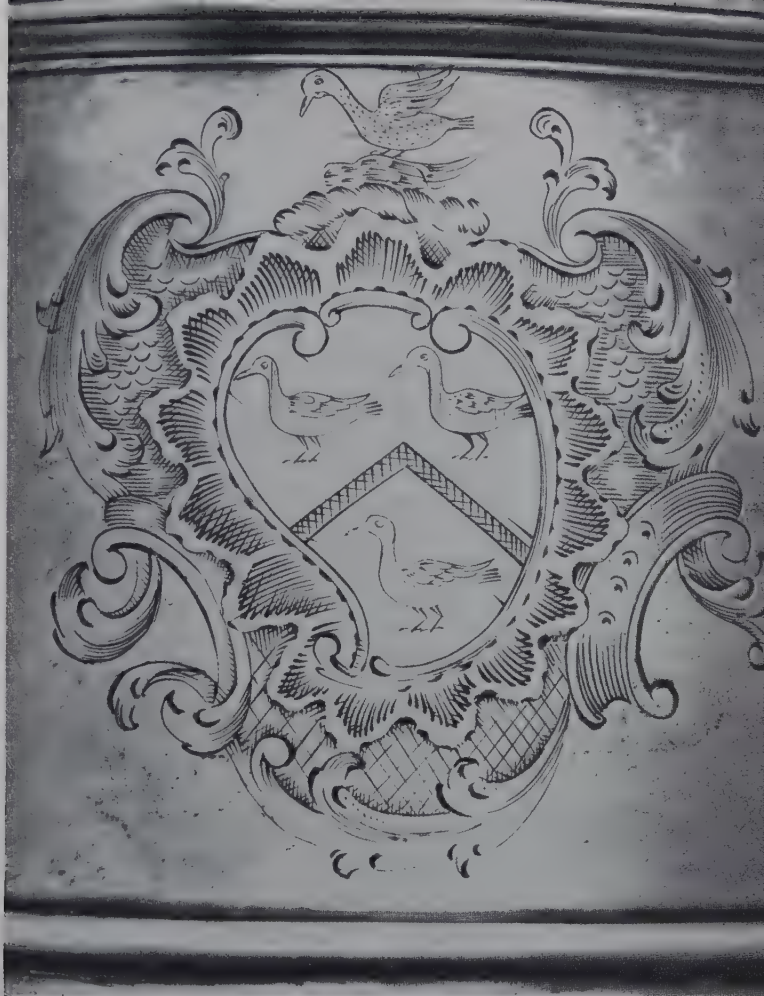


Fig. 34 Coat-of-Arms of the Henshaw Family on Tankard by Paul Revere, see Fig. 33.

Paul Revere, the Silversmith

by Dorothy N. Casey

WHEN the need of patriotism is as great throughout the world as it is today, one recalls the patriots who have rendered help in maintaining the rights of a country not yet defeated by any foe. Among them, the name of Paul Revere is one of the foremost because of his memorable midnight ride and allegiance in the struggle for freedom. Had he never participated in his ride to warn the rebels, Revere would have been well-known and remembered for his skill as a silversmith, although it was Longfellow's poem that made him the most celebrated of all such American craftsmen. As an engraver, he is particularly well-known, but more rarely do we hear mention of his ability to make artificial teeth. Revere himself advertizes: "that he can fix them as

well as any Surgeon-Dentist who ever came from London, he fixes them in such a Manner that they are not only an Ornament, but of real Use in Speaking and Eating."

Paul Revere, the son of Apollos Rivoire, a native of Riancaud, France, and Deborah Hitchborn of Boston, was born December 21, 1734 in Boston, the third child of a family of twelve. It was quite natural that he follow in his father's footsteps and pursue the trade of a silversmith. The ability of the son as an engraver and his apparent fondness for doing this work is evidenced by the number of pieces which bear this type of decoration. Because of his proficiency in this art, he was selected to engrave the first national paper currency in 1775. He also made gold and silver frames for miniatures painted by his neighbor, John Singleton Copley. It was the latter who painted the famous portrait of Revere depicted at his work, now in the collection of the Museum of Art, Boston.

Although the museum is especially interested in silver by Rhode Island craftsmen, this institution is most fortunate to have in its collection, five pieces by the famous patriot and all of them hollow-ware. There are two tankards, each bearing an engraved coat-of-arms, a creamer and a pair of beakers. It is with one of the tankards, the gift of Joseph G., Mary G. and Rebecca G. Henshaw, and the beakers, the bequest of William Pennell Goodwin, that we are especially concerned.

The tankard was an heirloom bearing the Henshaw coat-of-arms (Fig. 32). The body tapers slightly from the base and is interrupted by a midband, while the stepped and domed lid is surmounted by a pine cone finial. A graceful S-shaped handle terminating in a lion's head tip is decorated with a baluster drop, while the thumbpiece is one of the scroll type. A molded basal rim finishes the lower section. An example of Revere's excellent engraving is a coat-of-arms engraved on the front of the body. In appearance, it resembles that of the Henshaw family who resided in County Chester, England.

In heraldic terms the arms are recorded as follows: *Argent, a chevron, sable, between three heronshaws or moor hens, sable.* Crest: *A falcon belled, wings elevated, preying on a mallard's wing, argent guttée de sang.*

On the tankard, the ground of the shield is plain signifying argent (silver) with chevron sable (black) indicated by hatching of vertical and horizontal lines between three heronshaws or moor hens with vertical lines denoting gules (red). On the crest, a bird similar to those on the shield is engraved with raised wings, guttée de sang. This red color is indicated by vertical lines flecked with horizontal marks. The bird is preying on a mallard's wing (Fig. 33).

One of the original American settlers of the Henshaw family was Joshua, who was born in England about 1643 and who migrated to Dorchester, Massachusetts, in 1653. He served in King Philip's War under Captain Thomas Brattle in 1676. The tankard was probably made about 1775 for Benjamin and Huldah Henshaw, since the initials

^H
B H are engraved in block letters on the handle. He was a member of the fourth generation of the family in America, and his mother, Elizabeth Bass, was a direct descendant of John and Priscilla Alden.

The pair of beakers recently added to the Museum Collection were the bequest of Mr. Goodwin (Fig. 34). They are cylindrical in shape and flare slightly toward the top. Similar to many of Revere's beakers, they have no basal rim or rim at the lip, and are

devoid of decoration except for the letter, G, in script, engraved on the front of each piece. These beakers are two of a set of six, probably wrought for Ozias Goodwin. The latter was a sea captain, merchant in the China trade and president of an Insurance company. It is thought that he moved from Hartford, Connecticut, to Boston about 1789, as his name appears in the Boston Street Directory of that year. He was married to Elisabeth Chapman, the daughter of Jonathan Chapman and Jemima Miller Chapman.

Their daughter, Miss Eliza Goodwin, inherited many of the household furnishings at 7½ (now 5) Louisburg Square, Boston. Her niece, Mrs. Alexander Wadsworth, who was born in 1848, later occupied the house. In her recollections, she notes that at the family dinners with "Auntie," Miss Eliza, the silver tumblers were always used for drinking water pumped from a spring in the basement of the house. The spring has since been covered. Mrs. Wadsworth made note of the excellence of the spring water as attested by Miss Eliza Goodwin in some of her letters in which she also mentions the fact that neighbors came to obtain it for ill persons. She died

December 1857, and her possessions were divided between her brothers, Ozias Goodwin of Boston and George Washington Goodwin of Foxcroft, Maine. The latter received two of the beakers. About 1870, his widow and children moved from Maine to Providence. It was a son who bequeathed them to the Museum.

The Museum is most pleased to acquire silver wrought by a craftsman of such fame as Paul Revere. Never should the name of this great patriot grow dim, but should continue to glow as the reflection of light when it strikes the mellow surface of some of his handiwork.

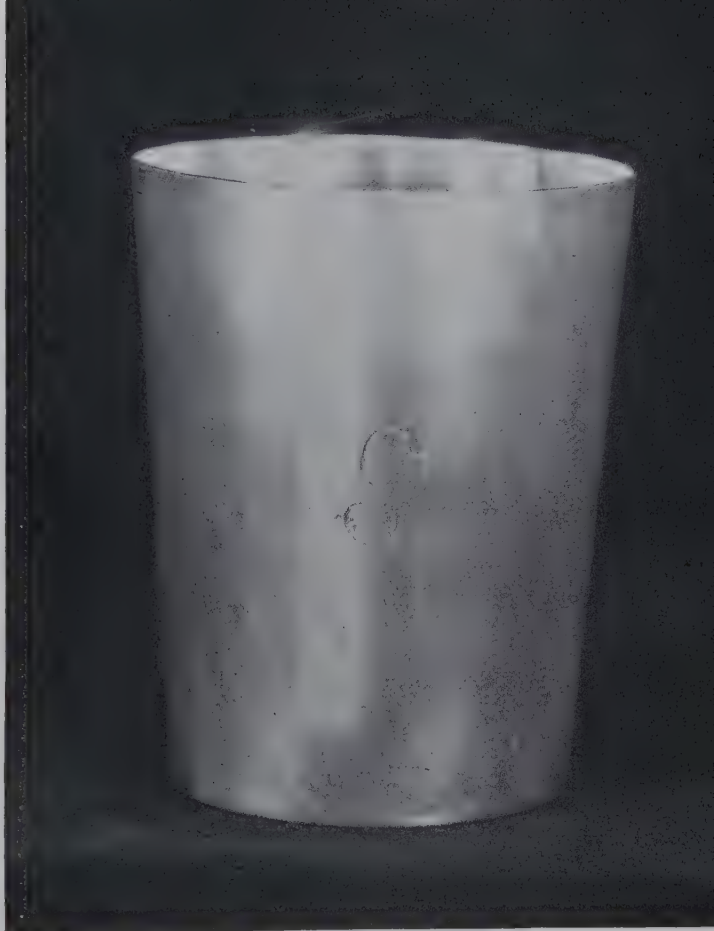


Fig. 35 Beaker by Paul Revere, Boston, Mass., 1735-1818. Bequest of William P. Goodwin.



American Folk Art-Three Recent Acquisitions

by *Miriam A. Banks*

THERE are two special reasons why American folk art meets with appreciation today. One reason is that our country has reached an age when, fully aware of its national distinction, it becomes intensely interested in its cultural beginnings. Not only do its artists turn deliberately toward "the American scene" for inspiration, but its art collectors bestow an avid interest upon the relics of the earliest native craftsmanship and indigenous artistic expression. Since in a new country, separated by thousands of miles of ocean from the mother lands, the first strivings towards artistic expression were bound to be made by ordinary folk seeking to add a little beauty and interest to utilitarian objects, this early native art can be appropriately termed "folk art."

Now there is another impelling reason other than the interest and pride of the American of today in the work of his ancestors which has transformed the attic lumber of the recent past into prized museum pieces. For during the last quarter century there has been a revulsion in art circles from the finished realism of the Victorian ideal and from the technical perfection of the Academies. The art of primitive peoples has been the inspiration of our painters and sculptors. The highest value has been accorded to abstract design. And in the work of the artisan untrained in schools this quality is often displayed in a high degree. Just as the child does, so the untrained adult artist unconsciously takes as his artistic quarry not the visual image but the image in his mind, which is compounded of sight and memory. Or again, he strips reality to its essentials and emphasizes only those features which are peculiarly fascinating to him. Thus, oddly enough, there is an affinity between the point of view of the highly sophisticated modern artist and of the untutored craftsman. Therefore, it is the connoisseur of modern abstract painting and sculpture who is apt to be the greatest enthusiast for American folk art.

The art of the carver early manifests itself in any community in which conquest of the basic necessities of life has been achieved and there is a striving for the amenities. The carver's art was nourished in the shipyards, for certain carvings were considered essential to a well-built ship in the 17th and 18th centuries; and shipyards flourished in nearly every seaport along the Atlantic coast within a few decades of the country's settlement. Each yard had its own carver or carvers, and the billet-heads, stern boards and figureheads turned out by these artisans are highly treasured today for their honest craftsmanship and individuality. His art was a trade and the carver of ships' ornaments learned his trade as an apprentice in a shop. Together with all craftsmen similarly trained, he respected his medium and knew the treatment best accorded the material he worked upon; and this is no small part of the reason the objects he made are still so artistically satisfying.

The sea chantey was the cradle song of American sculpture, because it is in the figureheads carved in abandoned sail or mold lofts on the busy wharves of Colonial seaports that its beginnings are found. In the good old days their number was legionary, but since they were made of perishable wood, only by rare good fortune have they survived the ships which they ornamented. Sometimes they were preserved for sentimental reasons by retired ship captains or shipowners. Sometimes because of their inherent charm or distinction, they were converted into garden statues and were brushed by flowery sprays instead of briny ones. A figurehead with such a history is now included in the collection of the Museum.

Our figure was actually called a garden figure when it was acquired in 1939, for when its former owner purchased it in Philadelphia he was told that it came from the garden of a lady who had bought it from a ship captain in Germantown. Its erect stature, and the fact that it was carved carefully at the back, led to the acceptance of that designation. Its kinship with the carved wooden figures by William Rush, usually considered America's first sculptor, was recognized, and it was remembered that, although undoubtedly the most famous figurehead carver in the history of the craft, much of Rush's work was executed for other purposes, as, for instance, his *Water Nymph and Bittern* for a fountain for the Philadelphia Water Works and the *Washington* now in Independence Hall. However, on careful examination and comparison with other figureheads, the character of our figure is self-evident.

The stance of a figurehead depended upon the model of the vessel it was destined to adorn. The ship of "full model," so-called, demanded an erect figurehead, while vessels with raking cutwaters required that the figureheads be borne horizontally. It is Rush who is credited with perfecting the "walking" figurehead, i.e., the figurehead with one leg advanced as if walking, thus suggesting a forward movement.

Our figurehead presents a stately woman in a simple flowing gown confined at the waist by a sash of folded cloth. She stands at ease, with right knee flexed, her left arm hanging at her side with fingers holding the looped-up folds of her skirt. Her right hand holds a cornucopia of fruit to her breast. Her hair is wound in a "bun" at the back of her head, and her face is framed by a garland of roses as a diadem, while a curl depends from either side of the garland on to her shoulders. The figure is now painted pale gray, suggesting stone, though there are indications of lighter paint, probably white, underneath. As it stands at present, broken off just above ankle height, it measures four feet, eight inches, an indication that it is approximately life size. In the breadth and simplicity of its workmanship, it has an almost classic dignity, and this effect is strengthened by the serenity and poise of the figure. In her proudly held head and her air of assurance, the lady has the appearance of a goddess. Indeed she may well be Pomona, the goddess of garden fruits, and, as suggested by her former owner, Mr. John Howard Benson, may have served as the figurehead for the barque of that name which sailed out of the port of Philadelphia in 1800.

Whenever the figurehead carvers were not engaged in the adornment of ships, they turned their skilled hands to other tasks, to the carving of mantelpieces and other archi-

Fig. 37 Portrait of a Young Girl by William Matthew Prior. American, "Fall River School," about 1840. Anonymous gift, 1938.





Fig. 38 Chadar. Indian, early 18th century. Gold and silk brocade. Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich, 1937.

Fig. 39 Detail of Fig



Silk brocades were expertly woven by both Mughal and Hindu weavers. Gold threads were lavishly used in the weaving adding to the sumptuousness of their gorgeous costumes. Many silks, combined with gold and having decorative borders in vivid colors, were woven at Pattan near Aurangabad in Deccan.

In 1935, an exhibition of oriental rugs and textiles was held at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Among the exhibitors was Miss Lucy T. Aldrich who lent among many textiles two beautiful early 18th century Indian chadars or garments used as shawls by Hindu women. The generous gift of these two textiles with others by Miss Aldrich to the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design we gratefully acknowledge.

The sari was the principal attire of the Hindu woman and measured usually between six and eight yards in length about one yard in width. It was wrapped around the waist and then carried up over the left shoulder and head finally falling down the right arm. The garments to be discussed suggest saris in type of fabric, but since they are only four yards long and over two yards wide they more closely approximate the size of a shawl. Dr. M. S. Dimand refers to them as chadars in the catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition. One of these, a superb piece of workmanship, has a finely woven center or body of pale rust-colored gauze decorated (Fig. 38) with rows of roundels woven of gold threads. These threads, called over-spun, are formed by winding narrow gold wires around silken cores. The gold content of many of these garments is surprisingly large as is evidenced by their great weight. A native Indian, becoming impoverished and finding no favorable opportunity to sell a cloth-of-gold sari, had it burned to recover the gold.

The side borders of our chadar are composed of three ornamental (Fig. 39) bands. In the middle one, there are flowering stems forming rows of medallions each enclosing two pairs of blue peacocks having green and yellow tail feathers and red-orange and blue wings. The two outside borders are alike and are formed of meandering stems bearing red-orange, rose-colored and blue flowers. These stems weave in and out around yellow-green parrots arranged in rows. The background of each border is of gold. The end borders are the same in color and design, but have an additional section of shimmering cloth-of-gold to separate them from the body of the garment. The borders and the center are woven separately and sewn together by hand. This is an extraordinarily beautiful garment and should when on exhibition command the attention of every museum habitu .

The other chadar (Fig. 40) is similar in type, but somewhat less elegant in design. It has a rust-colored muslin center with borders formed of well foliated meandering stems bearing flowers which suggest carnations in pale orange and rose-colored buds against a gold background.

The expanses of gold in these garments produce a lustrous quality that can be found in few except Indian textiles.

Fig. 40 Chadar. Indian, early 18th century. Gold and silk brocade. Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich, 1937. ➔



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